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TESTIMONY OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
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I appreciate the opportunity to support House Bill 5747, An Act Requiring Notification to the Department of Public Health of Positive Lyme Disease Results.

Fighting Lyme disease has been a priority for me because Lyme disease is a debilitating, destructive illness that affects thousands of Connecticut families each year. Yet, we have no accurate statistics as to how many people suffer from Lyme disease or whether incidence of the disease is increasing or decreasing. Such information is critical to effectively prevent and treat this pernicious disease.

In 2004, laboratories in our state stopped providing positive test results for Lyme disease to the Department of Public Health. As a result, a dramatic decrease was reported by the Department of Public Health -- to a number less than half the number of cases reported in 2003. The dramatic decline was a mirage -- indeed a statistical sleight of hand. The infection rate decline resulted from stopping the lab reports not stemming or stifling the disease itself. Even the higher number of cases in 2003 failed to reflect the real infection rate. The Department of Public Health concedes that those higher figures were only 1/6 to 1/10 the actual number of people infected with Lyme disease.

House Bill 5747 requires clinical laboratories to notify the Department of Public Health of all cases of positive Lyme disease results.

Numbers of Lyme disease cases do matter -- in fact, they can be a matter of life and death. The federal government and ordinary citizens rely on quantified statistics far more than any other type of evidence to determine trends, make allocations of grants and other resources, and establish levels of personal and public due diligence. If the public is wrongly led to believe the disease incidence is declining, they may have a false sense of security or progress. They may relax or reduce necessary efforts to continue vigilance and vigor in prevention and detection.

The Department of Public Health is currently implementing an electronic reporting system. Unfortunately, this system has been delayed repeatedly for several years and currently will only include one clinical laboratory. I urge the committee to approve House Bill 5747 with an amendment to require the Department of Public Health to publish the test results from the laboratories on an annual basis. Publication of this information will greatly assist the public and health care professionals in addressing and preventing Lyme disease.